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A biographer of Cardinal Francis Spellman said Monday the publisher of the book was being 'overly cautious' in having him tone down charges that the late New York archbishop as an active homosexual.

John Cooney, author of 'The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman,' acknowledged Monday he made 'minor changes' in the portion of the book describing Spellman as a homosexual.

Cooney made the alterations about two weeks ago after editors at The New York Times, a corporate affiliate of his publisher Times Books, read the galleys and said in a newspaper article Aug. 2 that Cooney did not have enough proof that Spellman was a homosexual.

Sandy Balwarsky, a spokeswoman for Time Books, said editors at the publishing house had already asked for additional proof before the newspaper article appeared.

Cooney, who is planning a biography on actor Zero Mostel for Times Books, said, 'It was a matter of editorial judgement.'

'Publishers have a right to make changes,' he said. 'I tend to think they were being overly cautious.'

Neither Cooney nor Times Books would discuss the specific changes made in the biography, scheduled to be published Oct. 31.

Sources close to the publisher noted that Cooney, a former features writer for the Wall Street Journal, was forced to qualify his charges about Spellman's alleged homosexuality to read 'some people knew that Spellman was a homosexual and others denied it.'

'It's a shame,' said Cooney. 'I'm convinced that he was sexually active.'

Cooney, who spent two years researching the book, said he talked to two lay people who claimed to have had a sexual relations with Spellman, New York's archbishop from 1946 until his death in 1967.

Cooney said he also interviewed priests and a psychiatrist who knew of Spellman's homosexual affairs.

The author said he was 'bewildered' by the attention given to an issue that takes up four pages in his 425-page biography, and said he does not think changes to the text will soften the impact of the book.

'It's a minor issue blown way out of proportion,' Cooney said. 'Spellman did a lot of wicked things and to focus on the sexual is ridiculous. He was involved with the CIA, FBI, he hurt many people...he undermined John Kennedy's campaign.'

The book is basically about Spellman's legendary political power, and the only reason he raised the homosexuality issue was because it was 'a bit of moral hypocrisy,' Cooney said.